



**COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF AUDITOR-CONTROLLER**

KENNETH HAHN HALL OF ADMINISTRATION
500 WEST TEMPLE STREET, ROOM 525
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90012-3873
PHONE: (213) 974-8301 FAX: (213) 626-5427

WENDY L. WATANABE
AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

MARIA M. OMS
CHIEF DEPUTY

ASST. AUDITOR-CONTROLLERS

ROBERT A. DAVIS
JOHN NAIMO
JUDI E. THOMAS

May 13, 2009

TO: Supervisor Don Knabe, Chairman
Supervisor Gloria Molina
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

FROM: Wendy L. Watanabe *Wendy L. Watanabe*
Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT: **OPTIMIST FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY CONTRACT REVIEW – A
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES PROVIDER**

We have completed a contract compliance review of Optimist Foster Family Agency (Optimist or Agency), a Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) provider.

Background

DCFS contracts with Optimist, a private non-profit community-based Foster Family agency organization to recruit, train and certify foster care parents for the supervision of children placed in foster care by DCFS. Once the Agency places a child, it is required to monitor the placement until the child is discharged from the program.

Optimist is required to hire qualified social workers to provide case management and act as a liaison between DCFS and foster parents. The Agency oversees a total of 69 certified foster homes in which 87 DCFS children were placed at the time of our review. Optimist operates offices in the First, Fourth and Fifth Districts.

DCFS pays Optimist a negotiated monthly rate, per child placement, established by the California Department of Social Services' (CDSS) Foster Care Rates Bureau. Based on the child's age, Optimist receives between \$1,589 and \$1,865 per month, per child. Out of these funds, the Agency pays the foster parents between \$624 and \$790 per month, per child. DCFS paid Optimist approximately \$1,629,000 during Fiscal Year 2007-08.

Purpose/Methodology

The purpose of our review was to determine whether Optimist was providing the services outlined in their Program Statement and the County contract. We reviewed certified foster parent files, children's case files, personnel files and interviewed the Agency's staff. We also visited six certified foster homes and interviewed the foster parents and children.

Results of Review

The foster parents stated that the services they received from Optimist generally met their expectations and the children stated that they enjoyed living with their foster parents. In addition, the six foster homes we visited were well maintained and in compliance with CDSS Title 22 regulations. Optimist also ensured that social workers' caseloads did not exceed the maximum established by CDSS Title 22 regulations.

Optimist needs to ensure that medical examinations and case files are in compliance with the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. For example:

- One of the 12 case files reviewed did not contain documentation that the child's DCFS social worker was provided with monthly updates on the child's progress.
- Two of the 12 children's initial dental examinations were conducted three months and 19 days late, respectively. In addition, one of the 12 children's initial medical examination was conducted 18 days late.
- Two of the six foster homes reviewed were not assessed by Optimist to determine the foster parent's ability to effectively care for more than two children prior to placing more than two children in the home.
- One of the eleven foster parents did not complete 15 hours of annual continuing education training. The foster parent only completed ten hours of continuing education.

The details of our review along with recommendations for corrective action are attached.

Review of Report

We discussed our report with Optimist on February 26, 2009. In their attached response, Optimist management indicates general agreement with our findings and the actions they are taking to implement the recommendations. DCFS will follow up with the Agency to ensure the recommendations are implemented.

We thank Optimist for their cooperation and assistance during this review. Please call me if you have any questions or your staff may contact Don Chadwick at (213) 253-0301.

WLW:MMO:DC:AA

Attachment

- c: William T Fujioka, Chief Executive Officer
- Patricia S. Ploehn, Director, Department of Children and Family Services
- Ted Myers, Chief Deputy Director, Department of Children and Family Services
- Susan Kerr, Senior Deputy Director, Department of Children and Family Services
- Gerrie O'Meara, President, Board of Directors, Optimist FFA
- Silvio J. Orlando, Executive Director, Optimist FFA
- Jean Chen, Community Care Licensing
- Public Information Office
- Audit Committee

**FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY PROGRAM
OPTIMIST FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY
FISCAL YEAR 2007-08**

BILLED SERVICES

Objective

Determine whether Optimist Foster Family Agency (Optimist or Agency) provided program services in accordance with their County contract and California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Title 22 regulations.

Verification

We visited six of the 69 Los Angeles County certified foster homes that Optimist billed the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) in May and June 2008, and interviewed six of the 11 foster parents and nine of the 21 foster children placed in the six homes. We also observed three toddlers in the six homes who were too young to interview. In addition, we reviewed the case files for 11 foster parents and 12 children. Finally, we reviewed the Agency's monitoring activity.

Results

The foster parents stated that the services they received from Optimist generally met their expectations, and the children stated that they enjoyed living with their foster parents. In addition, the six foster homes we visited were well maintained and in compliance with CDSS Title 22 regulations. However, Optimist did not always ensure that Needs and Services Plans (NSPs), medical examinations, and case files are in compliance with the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. Specifically:

Needs and Services Plans and Children's Case Files

- One (8%) of the 12 NSPs reviewed was not approved by the child's DCFS social worker as required. Optimist sent the NSP to the DCFS social worker for approval. However, the Agency did not follow up with the social worker when the approval was not obtained.
- One (8%) of the 12 case files reviewed did not contain documentation that the child's DCFS social worker was provided with monthly updates on the child's progress.

Medical Services

- Two (17%) of the 12 children's initial dental examinations were conducted three months and 19 days late, respectively. One (8%) of the 12 children's initial medical examination was conducted 18 days late.

Foster Parent Certification

- Two (33%) of the six foster homes were not assessed by Optimist to determine the foster parents' ability to effectively care for more than two children prior to placing more than two children in the home.
- One (9%) of the eleven foster parents did not complete 15 hours of annual continuing education training. The foster parent only completed ten hours of continuing education.

Recommendations

Optimist management ensure:

1. **Needs and Services Plans are approved by the children's DCFS social worker.**
2. **DCFS social workers are updated monthly regarding the children's progress.**
3. **Children's dental and medical examinations are conducted within the required timeframes.**
4. **Foster home assessments are completed for homes where more than two children are placed.**
5. **Foster parents complete the required number of annual continuing education training hours.**

CLIENT VERIFICATION**Objective**

Determine whether the program participants received the services that Optimist billed to DCFS.

Verification

We interviewed nine children placed in six Optimist certified foster homes and interviewed six foster parents to confirm the services Optimist billed to DCFS.

Results

The foster parents interviewed stated that the services they received from the Agency generally met their expectations and the foster children interviewed stated that they enjoyed living with their foster parents.

Recommendation

None.

STAFFING/CASELOAD LEVELS**Objective**

Determine whether Optimist social workers' caseloads do not exceed 15 placements and whether the supervising social worker does not supervise more than six social workers, as required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations.

Verification

We interviewed Optimist's administrator and reviewed caseload statistics and payroll records for the Agency's social workers and supervising social worker.

Results

Overall, Optimist's six social workers carried an average caseload of 12 cases, and the Agency's two supervising social workers supervised an average of three social workers.

Recommendation

None.

STAFFING QUALIFICATIONS**Objective**

Determine whether Optimist staff possess the education and work experience qualifications required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. In addition, determine whether the Agency conducted hiring clearances prior to hiring their staff and provided ongoing training to staff.

Verification

We interviewed Optimist's administrator and reviewed each staff's personnel file for documentation to confirm their education and work experience qualifications, hiring clearances and ongoing training.

Results

Optimist's administrator, supervising social worker and social workers possessed the education and work experience required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22

regulations. In addition, Optimist conducted the required hiring clearances for staff working on the County contract.

Recommendation

None.

PRIOR YEAR FOLLOW UP**Objective**

Determine the status of the Auditor-Controller's recommendations from prior monitoring report.

Verification

We verified whether the outstanding recommendations from the Fiscal Year 2006-07 monitoring review were implemented. The report was issued on February 27, 2007.

Results

The prior monitoring report contained three outstanding recommendations. Optimist fully implemented two of the recommendations and partially implemented one.

Recommendation

6. Optimist management fully implement the outstanding recommendation from the prior monitoring report and DCFS ensure the recommendation is implemented.



Today's Children Tomorrow's Promise

OPTIMIST COMMUNITY SERVICES

FOSTER FAMILY, ADOPTION, DAY TREATMENT & MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS

A division of Optimist Youth Homes & Family Services

St. John Orlando, ACSW
Executive Director

John H. Probst, LMT
Associate Director

To: Supervisor Don Knabe, Chair
Supervisor Gloria Molina
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Michael Antonovich

From: Nancy Sheppard, Director, Optimist Foster Family and Adoptions Services



Re: CAP for Fiscal Year 2008 - 2009 Auditor - Controller Report Findings

The following is our corrective action plan based on a draft of the findings report received at our Los Angeles Office on 2/26/09.

Accredited by



California Alliance
for Children, Youth & Families

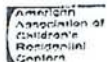
Recommendations

Optimist management ensure:



1. Needs and service plans are approved by the children's DCFS social worker

CAP - Our agency will consistently use the new form at the end of the NSP report template (created in 11/08) to document three attempts to obtain DCFS signature on all FC initial and quarterly NSPs. Clerical staff will audit for compliance on a quarterly basis. Supervisors will be notified through internal audits when 3 attempts for signature have yet to be made.



2. DCFS social workers are updated monthly regarding the children's progress



Optimist International

CAP - We have a form specifically used to document conversations and attempts for contact ("CSW Contact Log"). We will continue to internally audit for this after the first thirty days of placement and quarterly thereafter. We will also add an addition to the protocol that SWs submit their completed CSW contact logs at the end of each month to their supervisor for their review and approval, before these forms get filed. The addition to the protocol will be reviewed with social work staff at the next quarterly "All

Main Office: 7003 North Figueroa Street • Los Angeles, California 90041 • Tel: (323) 341-5561 / Fax: (323) 257-6418
Palmdale Office: 520 West Palmdale Boulevard, Suite H • Palmdale, California 93551 • Tel: (661) 272-4733 / Fax: (661) 272-2857
Long Beach Office: 1145 East San Antonio Drive • Long Beach, California 90807 • Tel: (562) 423-4475 / Fax: (562) 423-4050
Orange County Office: 14081 Yorba Street, Suite 238 • Tustin, California 92780 • Tel: (714) 838-7472

Team Meeting". This should significantly improve compliance with the monthly contact requirement.

3. *Children's dental and medical examinations are conducted within the required timeframes.*

CAP – Optimist social workers will be retrained at our next All Team Quarterly Meeting, and they will in turn review with foster parents, the requirements to have FC seen for initial medical and dental examinations within the contractual guidelines and about use of the HUB centers for these appointments unless DCFS instructs otherwise. There will be times when there are issues with activation of Medi Cal accounts, inability to get a timely HUB appointment, etc. When this is the case, it needs to be explained and communicated with DCFS. We will review the imperative nature of clearly documenting (both in the Medical section of the FC file as well as in the Initial NSP any issues which affect the delivery of timely medical/dental services to FC. We will also review with social workers that when DCFS informs us at time of intake or placement that a FC does not require initial medical and/or dental examinations, this needs to be clearly documented in the admission record and in the Initial NSP.

4. *Foster home assessments are completed for homes where more than two children are placed.*

CAP – Our agency has a protocol for making assessments for placing more than two children in a CFH. This protocol includes documenting our approval to do this, each time we do it, on a "Placement Evaluation" form. The protocol necessitates two people to make the assessment – the social worker who is processing the intake request and an administrator (Supervisor, Office Director or the Program Director) prior to placing the children.

We will improve on showing written documentation of making an assessment by putting in place a procedure wherein the completed and signed "Placement Evaluation" form becomes an audit item on the internal audit tool (for the first thirty days of placement). The existing protocol and the addition to the internal audit tool will be reviewed with all staff at the next All Staff quarterly meeting.

Foster parents complete the required number of annual continuing education training hours.

CAP – Since the time of the audit, our agency has developed an Excel program to track each foster parent's training hours for their certification year. The list includes, the certification date, title of the trainings and number of hours earned per training. We have switched to this as our "Foster Track" program has been declining over the years and is thus somewhat unreliable as a tool for tracking CFH compliance with training hours and other recertification requirements. The new spreadsheet is updated immediately

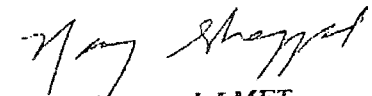
following submission of proof of training and the training certificate or other documentation is filed thereafter.

Prior Year Follow- Up

Optimist management fully implement the outstanding recommendation from the prior monitoring report.

The only recommendation from the prior monitoring report that was not fully implemented was the one indicating that DCFS approve (sign) all of our NSPs. With the addition of a DCFS signature attempt form (created in 11/08), that is attached to the DCFS NSP template, we are improving dramatically in our success rate for obtaining signatures and/or documenting our 3 attempts for signature and should be at 100% compliance at time of our next Auditor Controller monitoring visit.

We hope this CAP satisfies the above recommendations from your report. If further information is needed, I may be reached at (323) 341 – 5561.



Nancy Sheppard, LMFT
Director
Optimist Foster Family and Adoption Services